

Pierre-sur-Haute military radio station

The **Pierre-sur-Haute military radio station** is a French military communications site that has been in use since 1913. The 30-hectare (74-acre) station is located on a hilltop in the Sauvain and Job communes. The site contains three towers, the tallest of which is a 55-metre-high civilian telecommunication tower owned by *Télédiffusion de France*.[1]:01:48–01:55

In April 2013, the French interior intelligence agency DCRI pressured the president of Wikimedia France, Rémi Mathis, into deleting the French-language Wikipedia article about the station. It was then promptly restored by another Wikipedia contributor living in Switzerland. As a result of the controversy, the article temporarily became the most read page on the French Wikipedia, which was noted as an example of the Streisand effect.

Pierre-sur-Haute military radio station	
Station hertzienne militaire de Pierre-sur-Haute *(French)*	
	
The military radio station of Pierre-sur-Haute. Two military towers are pictured: the *Télédiffusion de France* relay tower is in the centre, with the living quarters, and a helipad.	
	
Coordinates	45.6531°N 3.8084°E
Type	Radio tower complex
Site information	
Controlled by	France
Site history	
Built	1961
Materials	Concrete, steel

History



The visual-telegraph station in the 1910s

In 1913, a semaphore telegraph station (French: *télégraphe Chappe*) was built where the military radio station is now. At the time, it was a small stone building, with a semaphore on top.[1]:05:03–05:35

In 1961, during the Cold War, NATO asked the French Army[1]:05:35–05:40 to build the station as part of the 82-node transmission network in Europe known as the ACE High system.[2] In this network, the Pierre-sur-Haute station, or FLYZ, was a relay between the Lachens (FNIZ) station to the south and the Mont-Août (FADZ) station to the north.[3] The NATO radio station was using American-made tropospheric scatter equipment to relay voice and telegraph signals on a network stretching from Turkey to the Arctic Polar Circle in Norway.[2] The French Air Force took control of the station in 1974.[1]:05:40–05:50 In the late 1980s, the system was gradually replaced by a combination of national defense systems and some NATO-owned subsystems.[2] The large parabolic antennas, known locally as *Mickey's ears*, were replaced with the current two-antenna setup in 1991.[1]:05:50–06:06

Role

The Pierre-sur-Haute station is controlled by the French Air Force and is a subsidiary of the Lyon – Mont Verdun Air Base, 80 km (50 mi) east of the station. It is one of the four radio stations[1]:03:52 along France's north-south axis, in constant communication with three others: Lacaune, Henrichemont and Rochefort air base.[4] The station is mainly used for transmissions relating to the command of operational units. If French nuclear weapons (*force de dissuasion*) were used, the fire order might pass through this relay.[1]:03:58–04:10

The station has been part of the *Commandement Air des Systèmes de Surveillance d'Information et de Communications* (Air Command of Surveillance, Information and Communication Systems) since its creation on 1 June 1994; from 1 January 2006, it has been run by the *Direction Interarmées des Réseaux d'Infrastructure et des Systèmes d'Information* (Joint Directorate of Infrastructure Networks and Information Systems).[4]

Infrastructure

The station is situated on a 30-hectare (74-acre) site[1]:03:17 between the communes of Sauvain and Job, straddling the border between the two departments of Loire and *Puy-de-Dôme*. The perimeter is surrounded by a high barrier of wood and metal.[1]:00:20–00:30


Concrete towers housing the military radio equipment at Pierre-sur-Haute

Buildings

There are three towers at the site. The tallest one is a 55-metre (180 ft) high civilian telecommunication tower, owned by Télédiffusion de France.[5] The telecommunication tower is topped by a radome and contains a mode S air traffic control radar beacon system owned by the Directorate General for Civil Aviation. The radar has been in operation since 18 August 2009[6][7] but has experienced malfunctions due to heavy snowfall in the area.[8] The two remaining concrete towers are owned by the military. The 30-metre (98 ft) high structures[9] have been used since 1991 for radio transmission and reception.[1]:05:50-06:06 These are built to withstand the blast of a nuclear explosion.[1]:02:19–02:35

Some buildings are used as garages and living quarters, complete with kitchen, dining room and bedrooms.[1]:09:00-10:30 They are linked together by tunnels, 400 metres (1,300 ft) in total length,[1]:12:00-12:10 so as to avoid walking through thick snow in winter when moving from one building to the other.[1]:08:45–09:00 About 20 personnel are stationed on-site,[1]:09:35 including electricians, mechanics, and cooks.[1]:09:50–10:03



The radio station with a snowkite in the foreground

Underground facilities

The most important part of the site is the underground section, used for transmissions dispatch: at a speed of 2 Mb/s,[1]:17:43 communications from the towers are analysed, then redirected to be transmitted.[1]:17:25–18:15 This part of the facility is supplied with chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defences. It defends against electromagnetic pulses using a Faraday cage. Positively pressured rooms help prevent contaminants from entering the facility.[1]:13:00-16:10 The facility has independent water and power supplies.[1]:20:45–22:30

Censorship on Wikipedia and unwanted attention

In March 2013, the French interior intelligence agency DCRI made a request for deletion of the French-language Wikipedia article about the site, titled *Station hertzienne militaire de Pierre-sur-Haute*. The Wikimedia Foundation then asked the DCRI which parts of the article were causing a problem, noting that the article closely reflected information in a 2004 documentary made by *Télévision Loire 7*, a French local television station, a film not only freely available online but made with the cooperation of the French Air Force.[10][11]

The DCRI then forced Rémi Mathis, a volunteer administrator of the French-language Wikipedia and president of Wikimedia France, under threat of detention and arrest, to delete the article.[10][12] The article was promptly restored by another Wikipedia contributor living in Switzerland.[13][14] As a result of the controversy, the article temporarily became the most-read page on the French Wikipedia,[15] with more than 120,000 page views during the weekend of 6–7 April 2013.[16] The high amount of extra attention was noted as an example of the Streisand effect in action.[14][15] For his role in the controversy, Mathis was named Wikipedian of the Year by Jimmy Wales at Wikimania 2013.[17]

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